

Food Irradiation: Why Vegetarians Should Care

Although red meat and poultry will be the most commonly irradiated foods, essentially all fruits and vegetables (and spices and teas) can be legally irradiated in the United States. Irradiation IS a vegetarian issue:

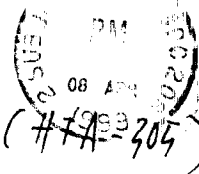
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- The United States has 50 licensed irradiation facilities: most are used to sterilize medical and pharmaceutical supplies, but 16 also irradiate spices for wholesale use, and several others already irradiate citrus fruits, tropical fruits, strawberries, tomatoes, mushrooms, potatoes and onions.
- Irradiation facilities will be built to make a profit—they will have to be used. Irradiators will actively recruit packagers and producers of fruits and vegetables, and products containing fruits and vegetables, to use irradiation.
- Some facilities will be built near slaughterhouses and handle only meat. Others will be built in agricultural communities to irradiate produce straight from the fields. Others will be built closer to the point of sale, in cities and suburbs. The more irradiation facilities, the greater the likelihood of accidental radiation release, worker exposure and long-term environmental contamination. Everyone will be affected.
- Irradiation can create new chemical compounds called radiolytic products. The effect of these radiolytic products, if eaten over a long period of time, has never been studied. Vegetarians who eat unlabeled irradiated foods will never know if the irradiated food is affecting their health.
- Irradiated foods lose vitamins. These losses will not be obvious or expected by the consumer of fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Plants will be genetically engineered for radiation tolerance. These special seeds will be patented, increasing the centralization of our food supply.
- Irradiation is not currently legal for organic foods. But in a few years, once public concern for organic standards dies down and irradiation is in widespread use for conventional foods without a labeling requirement, the FDA will quietly allow organic foods to be irradiated. You can count on it.
- Food irradiation is largely about protecting the profitability of the factory farming system. Irradiation would give factory farming and inhumane slaughterhouses a few more years of profit before irradiation-resistant bacteria put meat irradiators out of business. Without irradiation, these meat marketers would have to face up to the consequences of their dirty business sooner.

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